

DO NOT RISK YOUR LIFE OR THOSE YOU CARE ABOUT!

We know that you are interested in protecting your life, the lives of your loved ones and your property. Why then would you not take easy and inexpensive measures to do so? Did you know that eighty percent of fire deaths occur in homes and that most of those homes have no fire alarms (detectors)? Fire is the second leading cause of unintentional death in the home. Each year, nearly 3,700 people die in residential fires. Your chance of dying in a house fire is decreased by 50 percent if working smoke alarms are in your home. About 90 percent of U.S. households have smoke alarms installed, however, there are more homes with smoke alarms that do not function than homes that are without any fire alarm. That is, about 20 percent or 16 million smoke alarms were not working, mostly because the battery was dead or missing. Never remove the battery without replacing it with a fresh new battery.

Smoke alarms provide an early warning that there is a fire, in time for you to react. The smoke from a fire causes most fire injuries and deaths, rather than the flames from the fire. Fire alarms detect the presence of the smoke before it harms you. Do not panic if your smoke alarm is activated. If there is no smoke present, very cautiously investigate the problem. Once smoke is present, it is time to very quickly alert everyone in the home and evacuate the building. Plan, review and practice escape routes. Have at least two ways out of every room. Designate a meeting place outside, in front of the house, but away from the building, where everyone can gather and be accounted for. Never go back into a building where there is a fire.

Some smoke alarms that are battery operated, and others that are hard wired to the electrical wiring in the home. There are also smoke alarms that are designed for use by the physically challenged. Another type of battery operated alarm contains a 10 year battery - be certain to test and maintain these smoke alarms the same as any other. Purchase the best type of smoke alarm for you; but remember to always obtain one that has been approved by an independent testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL). There should be at least one smoke alarm on each level of the home, and one outside the bedroom. It is also recommended that a smoke alarm be installed inside each bedroom in addition to outside the room. Everyone is advised to sleep with their bedroom doors closed, so that in the event of a fire, the smoke, gases and fire are slowed down from entering the room. However, if you are a sound sleeper, you may not hear the smoke alarm outside your room.

Installing a smoke alarm is relatively simple. A battery operated smoke alarm requires only a drill and a screwdriver to install. A qualified electrician should install an alarm that is directly wired to the electrical system. A smoke alarm should never be connected to a circuit that can be turned off by a wall switch. Wall mounted smoke alarms should be installed 6 to 12 inches from the ceiling, and a ceiling mounted smoke alarm unit should be installed at least 6 inches from any wall. If the room has a pitched ceiling, install the smoke alarm near the ceiling's highest point. In stairways with no doors at the top or bottom, smoke alarms should be installed in the path, which the smoke would follow up the stairwell. If there is a door to the stairway, install the smoke alarm at the bottom of the stairway, as air trapped by the door at the top of the stairway could prevent smoke from reaching the smoke alarm located at the top. Do not install a smoke alarm too close to windows, doors or forced air heating registers as the air from them could interfere with the smoke detector being able to receive the smoke.

Each month, take a minute to make sure your smoke alarm works. Press the button with your finger, or if you cannot reach the button, use a broom handle to reach and press the button. Replace the battery in each detector once or twice a year, with the best time being when you change your clocks. A birthday or other significant date can also be used as long as it will be a reminder each year to change the battery(s). After you have changed the battery, and the smoke alarm still does not sound when tested, replace the smoke alarm immediately. If you have been away from home for an extended period of time, test the smoke alarm to make certain it is still working. If a smoke detector makes a "chirping" sound, replace the battery immediately, and if it continues after the battery is replaced, replace the smoke alarm. Replace any smoke alarm when it reaches 10 years of age.

If cooking causes the alarm to sound, do not remove the battery or disconnect the power source. Fan the smoke away from the alarm until it stops sounding. Some alarms come equipped with a silencer button, which when pressed, stops the alarm from sounding; but does not interfere with the operation of the smoke alarm. If cooking activates the smoke alarm frequently, it may become necessary to move the alarm to a location further from the cooking area. Read the owner's manual for your smoke alarm(s) and perform the maintenance that is recommended. Cleaning helps to remove dust and other dirt that may collect on the smoke alarm, as it may cause it not to function properly, either with false alarms or not alarming at all. Use a vacuum cleaner attachment to reach the smoke alarm and to remove the dirt. Never paint any part of a smoke alarm.

A properly working smoke alarm will generally give a few minutes to evacuate your home. If the smoke alarm is not working will not give you any warning, and this may cause injury or death to you and your loved ones. Do not take smoke alarms for granted they do need proper attention. Most smoke alarms can be purchased at hardware stores, home improvement centers, discount stores and other businesses for a cost of less than \$10.00. It has been well documented that smoke alarms have saved many lives. Your chances of surviving a fire are greatly reduced; if you properly select, install, and maintain smoke detectors in your home.

The volunteers of the Fort Washington Fire Company bring this information to you. If you have any questions or comments about this article, please feel free to call the Fire Company on their business line at 215-646-2555 or stop into either fire station any Monday night. Their Fire Prevention Committee is available to present programs upon request.